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ABSTRACT

This study focused on non-use of Air Force Family Support Centers (FSCs), a global network of programs and services designed to facilitate family adaptation to the mobile military lifestyle and to help commanders and supervisors respond to family needs. The study used the 1993 Air Force Needs Assessment Survey to investigate what factors facilitate or deter FSC use. Findings indicate that nonusers of FSCs had a low level of awareness of FSC services; perceived many barriers to FSC use; expressed few needs for community services; were officers rather than enlisted members; were spouses rather than active duty members; were single and childless rather than married with children; and were socially isolated from program information networks. (Includes recommendations and implications for the civilian corporate sector.) (EV)

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By

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BARRIERS AND FACILITATORS TO USE OF AIR FORCE FAMILY SUPPORT CENTERS (FSCs): LESSONS FOR CIVILIAN AND MILITARY SECTORS

Sondra Albano, Ph.D.

PROBLEM

Private sector work organizations make normative claims on employees, but only the military institution routinely confronts families with a unique constellation of onerous challenges. Frequent relocation, family separation, residence in foreign countries, short notice deployments, long hours, shift work, and risk of the service member's injury or death are the norm (Segal, 1989). Because military families are often uprooted from family of origin and kin support networks, alternate support systems are needed, particularly at critical junctures of the career and family life cycle. In the Air Force, 721,000 family members have generated an unprecedented demand for childcare, youth services, support during duty separation, employment assistance, emergency financial aid and relocation assistance. In response to this demand, the military sector has moved rapidly to develop a comprehensive system of family support. By 1993, an annual Congressional appropriation of $137 million had funded this worldwide network of 370 Family Centers with a combined staff of 3,150 human service professionals.

This study focuses on non-use of Air Force Family Support Centers (FSCs), a global network of programs and services designed to facilitate family adaptation to the mobile military lifestyle and to help commanders and supervisors respond to family needs. Both civilian and military sector helping agencies share the problem of reaching vulnerable yet elusive target populations for preventive social services. Many individuals who fail to

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use preventive services are among the most difficult to reach. The question of what factors facilitate or deter FSC use is the central problem of this research. This study fills a gap in knowledge of FSC use by identifying underserved target populations and individual and system-level factors contributing to use and non-use of Air Force Family Support Centers. Lessons learned can inform both military and civilian sector work and family initiatives as effective strategies to maximize linkage between helping resources and families in need are identified.

METHODS

The 1993 Air Force Needs Assessment Survey was mailed to 200,000 active duty Air Force members and spouses (not matched) at 101 Air Force bases. The questionnaire addressed Air Force member and spouse demographic characteristics; job issues and career options; family size, childrens' problems, and work and family interference; need, use and satisfaction with 119 family programs and community services; and relocation problems and use of relocation services.

The Air Force-wide sample was a stratified disproportionate random sample of active duty Air Force members and spouses assigned to all Air Force bases with an FSC (101 total bases). Sample size and weighting were a function of base population and rank distribution. Junior enlisted personnel were oversampled due to historically low response rates from this group.

To identify individual and system-level predictors of Air Force Family Support Center use and non-use, secondary analysis of data from the 1993 Air Force Community Needs Survey tests an adaptation of the Behavioral Model of Health Services Use using a stateside sub sample (N=1,531) of the full Air Force sample (N=67,571). This model

posits that both the decision to seek care and the amount of services received depend on the individual's predisposition to use services, the ability to secure services, and the need for care (Andersen et al., 1975). Individual background characteristics in concert with regional, social, cultural, family and agency influences appear to shape problem definition (perceived need), help-seeking behavior and the ultimate selection of particular resources for problem resolution (Figure 1.1).

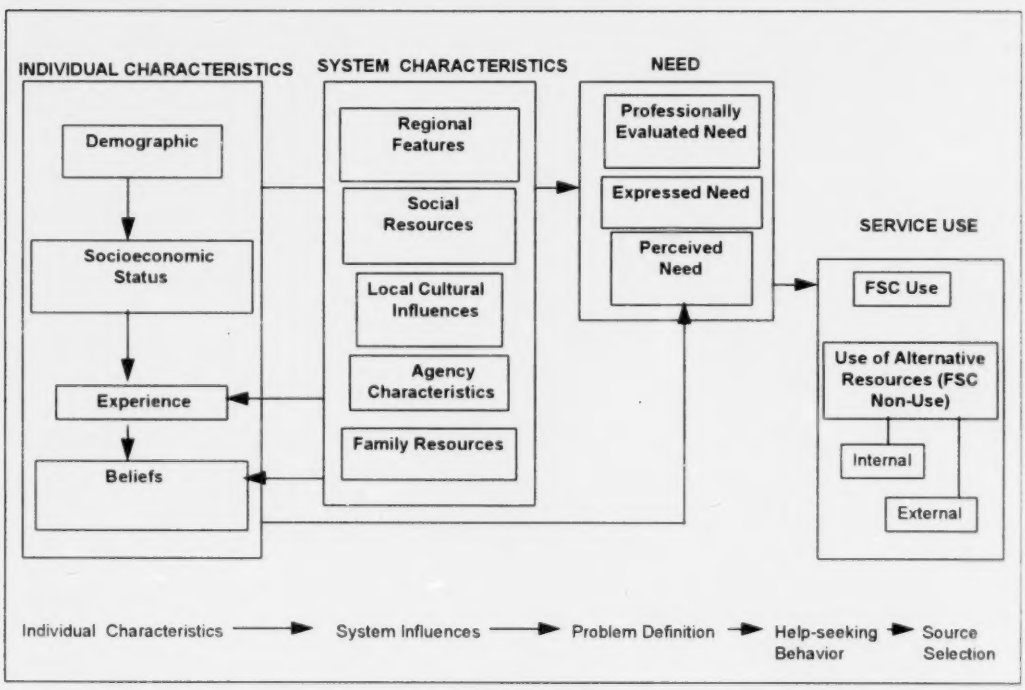

Figure 1.1 Determinants of Family Support Center Use

The first stage of the analysis described both Air Force and study samples in terms of individual and system characteristics from the major domains of the Behavioral Model of Health Services Use. The bivariate analyses identified statistically significant individual- and system-level correlates of FSC use and non-use. Finally, the regression analysis

identified variables that predicted the odds of FSC use while controlling for other factors. Users and non-users of the FSC were compared by race, rank, active duty versus spouse status, awareness of FSC services, and beliefs.

RESULTS

Individual Characteristics of Family Support Center Users and Non-Users

Individual characteristics were expected to affect FSC use because of differences in lifestyle and culture, life cycle stage, career phase, problem definition, prior experience with similar agencies and socialization. All independent variables were significantly related to the dependent variable of FSC use with the exception of education, self-help orientation, neighborhood tenure and FSC classification (Table 1.1).

Non-users of the FSC were significantly more likely to be younger, female, spouses, white and single. Junior enlisted members and all officers were significantly more likely than other rank groupings to be non-users of the FSC. These findings are consistent with the interpretation that non-users had less experience navigating the military human service delivery system in its present configuration and were less integrated into the current military social service subculture in which the FSC is embedded. Possible delegation of referral use by officers to senior NCOs could contribute to greater FSC use among senior NCOs and enlisted supervisors and less use by officers.

Non-users of the FSC were significantly more likely to have low or no awareness of FSC programs or services, perceive lack of confidentiality as a barrier to FSC use, view FSC programs or services as not meeting their needs, and lack interest in FSC programs or services.

Table 1.1

Individual Characteristics Associated with Family Support Center Non-Use

Demographic	Chi Square	p	df
Younger	t = -2.51	.012	
Female	4.53521	.03320	1
Spouse	5.44051	.01967	1
Single	13.11229	.00029	1
Socioeconomic Status			
Junior Enlisted Personnel	18.30162	.00259	5
All Officer Ranks	18.30162	.00259	5
White	12.99279	.02345	5
Beliefs			
Low Awareness	77.23864	.0000	13
No Awareness	150.51877	.00000	1
No Problems with the FSC	16.89804	.00004	1
Not Pertinent to Needs	112.67636	.00000	1
No Interest	162.78663	.000	1
Prefer Off-Base Services	121.88524	.00000	1
Lack of Confidentiality	120.81752	.00000	1
Perceived More Barriers	t = -13.06	.000	

Non-users of the FSC perceived significantly more barriers to FSC use than users and exhibited greater sensitivity to all barriers included in the survey questionnaire. Findings of previous studies (Kerce, 1987; Brown, 1988; and Kahn et al., 1982) have similarly suggested low valuation of preventive services by non-users and perceived irrelevance of services to needs by non-users. However, the finding that almost two-thirds of respondents (61.2 percent) had no problems with the FSC suggests that specific barriers may have less to do with FSC non-use than other variables in the model.

System Characteristics Associated with FSC Use and Non-Use

System characteristics were expected to affect FSC use by influencing experience, beliefs, availability, accessibility, and linkage with various formal and informal support

Table 1.2

System Characteristics Associated with Family Support Center Non-Use

System Characteristic	Chi Square	p	df
Region			
Greater Distance from Base	11.2394	.01107	3
Off-base Residence (full study sample)	5.54088	.01858	1
Off-base Residence (spouses only)	6.51972	.01067	1
Off-base Residence (active duty only)	1.38107	.23992 (N/S)	1
Social Resources			
"Never Hear Anything" (socially isolated)	23.47177	.00000	1
Dissatisfied with Unit Support of Families	47.94986	.00000	4
No Opinion on Unit Support of Families	47.94986	.00000	4
Very satisfied or satisfied with Supportiveness of Community	29.51148	.00001	4
Very dissatisfied with Supportiveness of Community	29.51148	.00001	4
No Opinion on Supportiveness of Community	29.51148	.00001	4
Less Likely to Volunteer (on- or off-base)	19.84264	.00001	1
Cultural Influences			
Perceived Lack of Leadership Support for FSC	140.28450	.00000	1
Agency and System Barriers			
Greater Number of Barriers Cited	t = -13.06	.000	
Lack of Child Care	119.59115	.00000	1
Inconvenient Location	133.08797	.00000	1
Lack of Transportation	160.95302	.00000	1
Expertise/Attitude of Staff is Poor	108.38654	.00000	1
Not Accessible for the Disabled	154.02036	.00000	1
Inconvenient Hours of Operation	116.59580	.00000	1
Old/Outdated Building	128.69147	.00000	1
Quality of Equipment or Furnishings is Poor	145.42640	.00000	1
Waiting Time Too Long	130.30219	.00000	1
Inadequate Parking	107.33308	.00000	1
Family Resources			
Parental Status (no children)	33.31292	.00001	6
No Second Job	8.01856	.00463	1

systems. Non-users of the FSC were significantly more likely than users to live off base and farther away from base (Table 1.2). Non-users were also less likely than users to volunteer on-base, less likely to volunteer at all, and more likely to claim "I never hear anything," an indicator of social isolation in the present study. Differential access to program information networks for spouses and active duty personnel are believed to have influenced use. Non-users were more likely to lack access to on-base information networks. These findings support the notion that both proximity to the FSC and membership in subcultures or organizations affiliated with the FSC may facilitate FSC use through easier access, greater awareness and beliefs which favorably predispose one to use the FSC.

Non-users were expected to perceive more barriers to the FSC due to lack of experience with the agency and less knowledge of the agency's purpose and target populations. Non-users cited a greater mean number of barriers to FSC use than users and were more sensitive to all barriers, whether individual beliefs or system features. However, beliefs preceded system barriers in degree of importance for non-users.

Non-users were more likely to be childless and to have a second job. Finally, non-users of the FSC expressed a need for half as many services as did users and were better represented at lower need levels (Table 1.3).

Table 1.3

Need and Family Support Center Non-Use

Need	Chi Square	p	df
Expressed Need for Fewer Services	t = 8.34	.000	
Lower Levels of Need	93.84693	.00000	1

The common theme that emerged from the bivariate analysis was that participation in or access to military program information networks facilitates FSC use. Status as an active duty member seemed to be the best indicator of membership in the military subculture, although immersion and lifestyle were expected to vary by rank and marital or parental status. For spouses, access to information was expected to increase with on-base employment or volunteerism. On-base residence was associated with increased likelihood of use, but sub analyses controlling for status suggested that on-base residence alone did not ensure greater integration into the military subculture. Spouses were less likely than military members to use the FSC whether on- or off-base, and military members' likelihood of use did not diminish as much as spouse likelihood of use by off-base residence. Factors which facilitate access to military program information networks are therefore expected to have a stronger relative contribution to FSC use than other variables in the regression analysis.

Summary of Logistic Regression Findings

The regression analyses showed number of barriers perceived, number of expressed needs and awareness of FSC programs to exert the strongest influence on FSC use (Table 1.4). Immersion in the military social service subculture by virtue of active duty status (particularly the ranks of E4 through E9) or volunteerism, minority status and parental status were also predictive of FSC use. The influence of some predictors was very specific. While status as a military member relative to status as a spouse predicted FSC use, only NCO status predicted increased odds of FSC use. While not volunteering

predicted decreased odds of use, only volunteering on-base or at the FSC predicted increased odds of use.

Table 1.4

Estimated Logistic Regression Core Model Predicting Family Support Center Use

Variable	Logistic Regression Coefficient (B)[1]	p	Exponential (B)[2]
Number of Barriers Perceived	-.1076	.0000	.8979
Number of Needs for Services Expressed	.0273	.0000	1.0277
Number of FSC Programs Aware Of	.0797	.0000	1.0830
Socially Isolated	-.8122	.0005	.4439
Rank of E4 through E6	.4624	.0006	1.5879
Volunteers at FSC	1.6447	.0066	5.1797
White	-.4199	.0090	.6571
Rank of E7 through E9	.4898	.0104	1.6319
No Children	-.3343	.0163	.7158
Does Not Volunteer	-.2807	.0231	.7553
Active Duty Status	.2942	.0435	1.3420
Constant	-.1957	.4271	

These findings support the concept that individuals are embedded in concentric and overlapping layers of a social system. Hence, participation in subcultures most closely related to the FSC subculture increases the probability of FSC use. NCOs' greater awareness of the FSC may reflect greater experience navigating that system by virtue of their roles as supervisors, as well as direct use to prepare for separation or retirement. In the core regression model, specific enabling variables indicated selective community involvement. Through on-base volunteering or through the military workplace, individuals have access to FSC program information and greater immersion in the norms

[1]The logistic regression coefficient indicates the change in the log odds (of FSC use) associated with a one-unit change in the independent variable.

[2]Exponential (B) indicates the factor by which the odds of FSC use increase or decrease.

of that subculture. Both individual and system level variables which increased geographic or social proximity to the FSC and related subcultures or their information networks increased likelihood of FSC use. In other words, cultural consonance increased use.

The findings also suggest that the FSC is not reaching all intended populations. Spouses and active duty members differed in terms of both awareness and use of services. Membership in the military organization increased the odds of FSC use, particularly among noncommissioned officers (NCOs). But regardless of on- or off-base residence, most military members travel to and work on the military installation daily. For spouses among the 60 percent of military families who reside off base, limited access to program information and geographic separation constrain use, especially for spouses who neither work nor volunteer on base. Prior research (OASD, 1993) emphasized that junior enlisted personnel were less likely to use family support services. This study also identified underserved populations of spouses and officers.

In sum, the analyses revealed that nonusers of the FSC had a low level of awareness of FSC services; perceived many barriers to FSC use; expressed few needs for community services; were officers rather than enlisted members; were spouses rather than active duty members; were single and childless rather than married with children; and were socially isolated from program information networks.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding analyses and findings support the utility of both the Behavioral Model of Health Services Use and social integration theory in explaining social service use in the Air Force. Both individual and system attributes influenced FSC use by facilitating proximity and involvement in social networks related to the FSC. As in previous studies,

need remained a strong predictor of use. Demographic and socioeconomic predictors suggested social and job affiliations that in turn affected degree of linkage with the FSC and like agencies.

The findings are consistent with the interpretation that non-users had less experience navigating the military human service delivery system in its present configuration and were less integrated into the current military social service subculture in which the FSC is embedded. The findings countered the assumption that the FSC serves families rather than active duty members. They do support social integration theory, which claims that structure generates association, and the notion that individuals are embedded in concentric and overlapping layers of a social system. Participation in subcultures most closely related to the FSC subculture increased the likelihood of FSC use. In the core regression model, specific enabling variables indicated selective community involvement. Through on-base volunteering or through the military workplace, many individuals had access to FSC program information and greater immersion in the norms of that subculture. In the present study, individual and system characteristics that maximized proximity to the FSC subculture enhanced the likelihood of service use.

A new service delivery approach is needed to increase linkage with underserved populations. To counter low awareness and the diffuse negative evaluation of FSCs characteristic of non-users and to increase use by underserved groups the following actions are recommended:

1. Target first-term enlisted and officer personnel and spouses by positioning the FSC at "gateways to the military subculture." The military offers a captive audience but

spouses are not included except at certain points such as arrival at a new duty station. By integrating the FSC and in processing functions, the FSC will be present and dominant at that first critical moment of interface between the spouse and the military institution. A favorable context of reception can increase help-seeking behavior.

2. Facilitate the bonding of the spouse and the military institution by capitalizing on the military institution's penchant for ritual. Spouses can be included in orientations to the organization's culture and services. Socializing new families to military life can increase commitment and cooperation rather than conflict over the service member's loyalty.
3. Extend formal, office-based services through proactive outreach and service delivery at alternate locations to make services more accessible to hard-to-reach groups and remote target populations.
4. Remove the stigma affiliated with help-seeking behavior by targeting underserved populations such as spouses and enlisted personnel without alienating other groups such as officer families. The FSC's Transition Assistance Program and Relocation Program are examples of such universal services, which are mandated for all inbound and retiring and separating personnel, regardless of rank. Such "targeting within universalism" (Skocpol, 1989) has succeeded in reaching elusive populations without stigma while garnering support from a broad constituency that crosses lines of rank, marital status and ethnicity.

5. Generate association between potential users and services by establishing and sustaining linkages between target populations, their informal support networks, and formal support systems.

6. Build on the strong value of teamwork fundamental to the military to counter the notion of rugged individualism that can deter help-seeking behavior. Emphasize the notion of interdependence among individuals and support institutions. Professional Military Education and organizational training programs offer key opportunities to initiate values change later in life.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CIVILIAN CORPORATE SECTOR

While military and civilian sectors differ in terms of intrusion into family life and the demands placed on workers and families, they share common goals of productivity, recruitment and retention of well-qualified, motivated personnel and effectiveness. These shared interests suggest that lessons learned from the military experience with family support programs can inform corporate sector design, marketing and delivery of work and family initiatives.

The Air Force's provision of family support services reflects an evolving recognition of the interrelatedness of work and family. Bringing workers and their families closer to the "organizational core" may realize greater service awareness and use. The corporate sector can make family less peripheral and more central to corporate philosophy and policy by offering support to family members when making extraordinary job demands on workers such as relocation, transition, or frequent travel, as well as considering support for the "routine" challenges of daily life such as finding affordable and accessible quality child and elder care. Just as the military takes a comprehensive, life

cycle approach to family programming, the corporate sector can implement a proactive, strategic approach to work/family program planning to support workers and their families throughout the family and career cycle. The joint, collaborative efforts of today's military system can also characterize civilian corporate sector family support efforts. Interoperability among all elements of the military institution is the greatest challenge of today's uniformed services. Elements of corporate family support systems can collaborate to streamline service delivery and enhance the navigability of human resource systems to more effectively serve workers and their families.

This study suggested several broad strategies to reach vulnerable, hard-to-reach target populations. Strategies that maximize linkage among people, formal agencies and informal networks, increase access to information networks and enhance integration into the social service delivery subculture can facilitate service use. Service delivery systems have become increasingly differentiated, fragmented and confusing for consumers in an attempt to meet the diverse needs of families. To better serve workers and families, a new culture that incorporates a caregiving ethos and a model that is more collaborative, participatory and outreach-oriented may improve linkage with underserved populations.

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